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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000419

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/21/2016

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SUBJECT: ISTANBUL'S AKP AND CHP - A STUDY IN CONTRASTS

Classified By: Consul General Deborah K. Jones, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Recent calls on their Istanbul political party headquarters highlighted stark contrasts between Turkey's pedigreed social-democratic Republican People's Party (CHP) and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). The AKP's brightly decorated, modular headquarters hummed with activity and the "buzz" we associate with campaign preparations, while the CHP's elegant "fin de siecle" law office suite housed only the Chair, his deputy and several secretaries, reflecting the party's traditional approach and -- perhaps inadvertently -- its dearth of new ideas. Istanbul AKP Chairman Mehmet Muezzinoglu met us around a collegial table that included leading members of his council representing women, youth, and foreign affairs. Istanbul CHP First Secretary Gokan Zeybek stood in for absent Chairman Sinasi Oktem, pontificating from the latter's desk while a dutiful female secretary silently took notes. End summary.

AKP: A WELL-HONED MACHINE  
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¶2. (C) If first impressions count for anything, the Istanbul branch of the Prime Minister's AK Parti will contend the next elections in command of a well-honed political machine. Istanbul AKP Chairman Dr. Muezzinoglu judged party support to be more than 45 percent of the Istanbul electorate and attributed this optimistic figure to the work of the party's one million precinct workers who meet weekly to discuss problems and map strategy. He said the public has come to see these AKP representatives as problem solvers who work "on the street level" and attributed their effectiveness in part to the absence of other sources of support for constituents' problems. Canvassers go door-to-door with representatives for women, youth and the party's administrative board. Reportedly, AKP representatives appear when a newborn arrives, with small gifts and an offer to provide any needed services while the family adjusts.

¶3. (C) A relaxed Muezzinoglu readily ticked off three goals for Turkish societal development over the next 20 years: Turkey should reach the "ideal" in human rights; the Turkish judicial system should model the best in jurisprudence; and civil society should operate on a higher plane leading to a stronger democracy within Turkey. On the economy, his timeline, though shorter, was equally ambitious: within five years, average worker annual income would be in the range of 20,000 to 25,000 Yeni Turkish Lira (YTL), the equivalent of 15,000-19,000 USD; varying widely depending in part on location, current annual income is 6,500 YTL, the equivalent of 5,000 USD. In response to our query, Muezzinoglu candidly acknowledged incidents of corruption within the party's lower levels and said unspecified disciplinary action had been taken. Throughout the discussion, various committee members

of both genders seated around the table chimed in collegially. (Note: Senior female committee members were bare-headed and not wearing the distinctive AKP head covering. End note.)

CHP: LIVING IN THE PAST  
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14. (C) In contrast, the meeting with the CHP showcased a party nostalgic for its glorious past without much of a plan for the future. CHP Istanbul First Education Secretary Gokan Zeybek, standing in for the unannounced absence of Istanbul party chief Oktem (later explained to have been summoned to Ankara at the last minute by CHP leader Deniz Baykal), responded to every question regarding CHP's gameplan for attracting a larger and younger constituency with criticisms of the ruling AKP and a flat assertion that the the ruling Prime Minister could not carry the next elections. Zeybek launched into a familiar litany of how the shift in ideological struggle between East and West, i.e., the USSR and U.S., to that between North and South and Islamists and Western secularists ("especially following the U.S. invasion of Iraq"), had resulted in a weakening of the CHP together with other secular parties. Zeybek asserted that unnamed Arab governments had funded Erdogan's rise to power and the growth of the AKP, taking advantage of Turkey's economic/banking crisis of 2001. He added that even as Turkey's government swore allegiance to a secular state, they had a debt to pay for the "green money" flowing into Turkey from its Islamist neighbors. Zeybek propounded a return to the Jacobin principles espoused by CHP founder Ataturk when founding modern Turkey. In what appeared to be an oblique criticism of the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative, Zeybek remarked facetiously: "I don't think the demand for secular, democratic governance will come from

ISTANBUL 00000419 002 OF 002

people in the Middle East."

16. (C) Comment. The contrast between the two party headquarters could not have been starker. While the AKP in Istanbul has adopted the devices and approaches of a modern, aggressive political party, the CHP seems content to hide behind Ataturk's icon, with dated methods, message and a political hierarchy that has earned it the nickname of "Turkey's Baath Party". End comment.  
JONES